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Nativity and Ethnic Differences in Home Environment and Early Cognitive Development

This paper focuses on the cognitive development of young children from diverse backgrounds with a particular focus on ethnic and nativity differences in home environments. Hypotheses are developed addressing the possibility that such environments differ among immigrant and native families within the same ethnic groups and the extent to which mother's age at arrival plays an important role in explaining differences in developmental trajectories. Using data from the first two waves of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study-Birth cohort, the analyses demonstrate the significant racial and ethnic differences in several dimensions of the home environment and access to resources. Mother's age at arrival in the United States is also associated with more disadvantaged home environments, particularly in the case of economic resources and maternal education. Multivariate analyses indicate that racial and ethnic differences in cognitive development increase over time but family resources and parenting practices reduce differences in cognitive development by ethnicity and nativity. Overall, parental responsiveness is associated with more positive gains in cognitive development among children of foreign born mothers than their counterparts with US born mothers.